

Message Text

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70

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03

RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 EB-11 COME-00 RSR-01 HEW-08

AID-20 /091 W

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R 252034Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8616

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USCINCSO

UNCLAS BOGOTA 6082

E O 11652: NA

TAGS: OGEN CO

REF BOGTA 6003, 5982

SUBJ: AVIANCA BUILDING FIRE

1. A MAJOR FIRE RAGED THROUGH BOGOTA'S TALLEST BUILDING, THE AVIANCA BLDG MON JULY 23 AND DAMAGED OR DESTROYED MOST OF THE FLOORS FROM THE 13TH THROUGH 40TH. THE FIRE CAUSE AS YET UNKNOWN, CLAIMED FOUR LIVES AND APPROX 70 INJURIES. THE BUILDING IS REPORTEDLY STRUCTURALLY UNDAMAGED AND WILL BE REBUILT AT A COST ESTIMATED BY THE MEDIA AT 100 MILLION PESOS (US\$4 MILLION). ESTIMATES PUBLISHED IN WED PRESS PLACE FIGURE FOR REPLACEMENT OF EQUIPMENT DAMAGED IN THE FIRE AT 50 MILLION PESOS (US\$2 MILLION).

2. ORIGINAL ESTIMATES OF BOTH LOSS OF LIFE AND PHYSICAL DAMAGE ARE BEING REVISED DOWNWARD AND THE PROPORTIONS OF THE TRAGEDY SEEM TO BE MUCH LESS THAN ORIGINALLY EXPECTED. THE MAJOR PROBLEM TO BE FACED SEEMS TO BE REPLACEMENT OF RECORDS OF GOVT AGENCIES LOCATED IN THE BUILDING. CONFUSION IN THE ECONOMIC SECTOR CAUSED BY DISLOCATIONS OF IMPORTANT GOVT AGENCIES HOUSED IN THE BLDG WILL PROBABLY BE BIGGEST PROBLEM. HOWEVER THE COLOMBIAN FOREIGN
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COMMERCE INSTITUTE (INCOMEX), THE ORG HARDEST HIT BY THE FIRE IS

OPTIMISTIC. THEIR LOSSES INCLUDED BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE THOUSAND IMPORT LICENSES, ALL OF THEIR ARCHIVES, ALL DOCUMENTATION FOR THE GATT NEGOTIATIONS AND ALL DOCUMENTATION REGARDING THE ANDEAN PACT. OFFICIALS REPORTED TO THE PRESS THAT ABOUT 98 PERCENT OF THE DOCUMENTS CAN BE REPLACED FROM RECORDS STORED IN OTHER OFFICES AND THAT SOME DOCUMENTATION CAN BE OBTAINED FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES. ONLY THREE MONTHS OF RECORDS WERE DESTROYED COMPLETELY AND EVEN THOSE CAN PROBABLY BE RECOVERED FROM OTHER AGENCIES. INCOMEX EXPECTS TO BE OPERATING NORMALLY WITHIN TWO OR THREE MONTHS AND QUOTE ALMOST NORMALLY UNQUOTE WITHIN A WEEK.

3. IN BARRANQUILLA, COLOMBIA'S IMPORTANT CARIBBEAN PORT CITY, ANOTHER MONDAY FIRE DESTROYED THREE INDUSTRIAL PLANTS AND SEVERAL ADJOINING RESIDENCES. THE FIRE STARTED IN THE LUMITON PAINT FACTORY AND SPREAD TO TWO NEARBY FACTORIES. REPORTS IN WED'S PRESS PLACED DAMAGES AT MORE THAN 30 MILLION PESOS (US\$1.3 MILLION). THE LUMITON FACTORY PRODUCES PAINT FOR AVIANCA'S AIRPLANES.

4. GOVT OFFICIALS REPORTED TO THE PRESS THAT COMPLETE INVESTIGATIONS OF BOTH FIRES WILL BE CONDUCTED.
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